

**METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**

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REGIONAL DROUGHT “WATCH” DECLARED***Voluntary Water Conservation Efforts Encouraged to Help Reduce Demands on Water Supply***

Washington, D.C. - As unusually dry conditions persist throughout the region, a drought "WATCH" was put into effect today asking residents and businesses to conserve water and help reduce demand on the region's water supply systems, announced the Drought Coordination Committee of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG).

The WATCH is the second level of COG's four-stage regional drought response plan used to monitor water levels and respond to drought conditions throughout the year. Regional officials emphasized that while there currently is an adequate supply of water in the Potomac River and back-up reservoirs, several smaller systems are experiencing more significant problems. Implementing voluntary water conservation across the region at this time will help complement the stricter restrictions already in place in the smaller systems and help ensure that water supplies will remain adequate.

"Even though in the fall the demand for water typically declines, we want to emphasize and encourage the public to continue to practice outdoor and indoor water conservation measures," said Committee Chair and Fairfax County Executive Tony Griffin. "Limiting the watering of lawns, plants and shrubs, using a broom instead of a hose to clean sidewalks and driveways, repairing leaking toilets and faucets, reducing shower length to under 5 minutes, turning off water while brushing your teeth, and washing full loads in dish and clothes washers are all simple ways to save water. We urge everyone to follow these common-sense guidelines."

Although conditions in some jurisdictions have necessitated stricter measures, including mandatory restrictions, at this time officials do not anticipate reaching the WARNING or EMERGENCY stages of the Regional Plan for those who get their water from the Potomac River system.

The flow in the Potomac River, while low, remains at a level about twice that of current water supply demands. Special water supply reservoirs constructed in the early 1980s to provide water during droughts are currently full and unlikely to be needed. While water supply reservoirs in the regional Potomac system, the Occoquan, Rocky Gorge, and Triadelphia, are within planned operating levels, voluntary conservation will help keep them there. Other water supply reservoirs such as Lake Manassas and Beaverdam are below their normal planned operating levels.

Residents and businesses are being asked to use water wisely as part of their daily routines. Increasing conservation efforts now and throughout the year will help maximize use of water resources especially if dry conditions persist into next spring. A detailed list of wise water tips can be found at www.wisewateruse.com.

The dry conditions being experienced in the Potomac River Basin are part of a much larger area of drought affecting the U.S. mid-Atlantic region. Precipitation in the Washington area over the past month is 50 to 75 percent below normal and has dropped more than five inches below normal in the past 90 days. River flows are also well below normal levels, and the NOAA Climate Prediction Center has declared 56 percent of the Potomac River Basin to be moderately to severely dry. Fortunately, due to sound planning by area water utilities and local governments, most of the area is far better prepared to withstand drought than many other regions of the country. Because fire safety and protection is also of particular concern because of dry conditions, especially from wildfires and brushfires, committee members encourage residents to use extra caution when smoking outside, using outdoor grills or engaging in other activities that involve flammable materials.

COG is the association of 21 local governments working for a better metropolitan area.

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